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ABSTRACT

A study explored how adolescents' negotiations and interpretations of out-of-school reading discussions were shaped by larger institutional and societal contexts that regularly influence young people's actions and interactions with peers and adults. Drawing from a theoretical framework that conceives of discourse as social practice, such discourse was located in the interplay among three contexts: the situation-specific (or local context), the institutional context, and the societal context. The 22 adolescent and 2 adult participants met weekly in a library for 15 discussions as part of 4 Read & Talk Clubs. Primary data sources included the adolescents' daily literacy activity logs, field notes, and transcripts of audiotaped interviews with the adolescents and their parents. An adaptation of N. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis was used to relate R&T Club members' socially mediated interactions to the three contexts. Findings show the adolescents read an average of 46 minutes a day, 7 days a week, over a 15-week period. This was voluntary out-of-school reading--that is, reading done in addition to school-related assignments. Evidence from the interviews suggests that R&T Clubs were viewed as social outlets for adolescents who like to read. The gendered discursive practices that were observed were as varied as those known to exist in society at large. (Contains 74 references and a chart listing club members' grade, sex, and ethnicity. Appendixes present a recruitment flyer and a literacy activity log.) (Author/RS)

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READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 77
Winter 1997

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READING RESEARCH REPORT NO. 77
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The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct research on reading and reading instruction. The NRRC is operated by a consortium of the University of Georgia and the University of Maryland College Park in collaboration with researchers at several institutions nationwide.

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Adolescents' Negotiations of Out-of-School Reading Discussions

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Abstract. *The purpose of this study was to explore how adolescents' negotiations and interpretations of out-of-school reading discussions were shaped by larger institutional and societal contexts that regularly influence young people's actions and interactions with peers and adults. Drawing from a theoretical framework that conceives of discourse as social practice, we were interested in locating such discourse in the interplay between three contexts: the situation-specific (or local context), the institutional context, and the societal context. The 22 adolescent and 2 adult participants met weekly in a library for 15 discussions as part of four Read & Talk Clubs. Primary data sources included the adolescents' daily literacy activity logs, field notes, and transcripts of audiotaped interviews with the adolescents and their parents. An adaptation of Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse analysis was used to relate R & T Club members' socially mediated interactions to the three contexts named above. Findings show the adolescents read an average of 46 min a day, 7 days a week, over a 15-week period. This was voluntary out-of-school reading—that is, reading done in addition to school-related assignments. Evidence from the interviews suggests that the R & T Clubs were viewed as social outlets for adolescents who like to read. Implications of negotiated social practices and the gendered discursivity of the R & T Clubs are also discussed.*

> Athene: I feel like I'm kind of weird cuz I read a lot. I mean, people look at me weird, you know?
>
> Bunny: People who read a lot usually get a title—"nerd" or something. You know, they don't want to be a "geek" or "nerd."
>
> Crazy E: I don't think you can say you're a nerd because you read.
>
> Bunny: Me neither.
>
> Buzz: But most people—I bring books to school and they look at me, like, oh my god, what kind of weirdo are you?

This excerpt from a young adolescent Read and Talk Club[1] meeting (one of four out-of-school reading groups that met weekly at a

[1]Although the Read and Talk Clubs, so-named by one of the teens in our study, bear some resemblance to Book Clubs (McMahon & Raphael, in press; McMahon, Raphael, & Goatley, 1995), they differ in one important way. The R & T Clubs were not conceived as instructional in nature. This distinguishing feature, according to McMahon (personal communication, S. McMahon, April 29, 1996), sets them apart.

local public library) signals the frustration its members felt when others in their peer group at school poked fun at them for reading. We believe it also signals the importance of considering situation-specific interactions, such as the one just illustrated, within the broader institutional and societal contexts that partially shape and give rise to their production and interpretation. An argument for implicating the larger sociocultural milieu in this way is found in Gilbert's (1992) critique of text and context—a critique that takes into account the tendency of researchers working from an emic perspective "to neglect the historically institutionalized nature of language and meaning" (p. 37). In brief, Gilbert's point is that too many qualitative studies in education focus on relating the particular to the general at the expense of considering how the more general constitutes the particular.

Juxtaposing the particular and the general in the writing of this research report required taking a highly inferential approach to the data of such situation-specific interactions as the example involving Athene, Bunny, Crazy E, and Buzz. We acknowledge the controversial nature of this approach[2] but find it justified in light of the fact that our purpose in conducting the study was to explore how adolescents' negotiations and interpretations of out-of-school reading discussions are shaped by larger institutional and societal contexts that regularly inform young people's actions and interactions with peers and adults.

A theme that is central to much of the research on adolescent peer cultures is the importance of communal activity—a term Corsaro and Eder (1990) use in referring to individuals' "negotiating, sharing, and joint culture creating with adults and peers" (p. 217). Communal activity as a theme is particularly prevalent among researchers who have looked at variations in the socialization of young people in school settings (Everhart, 1983; Finders, 1996a, 1996b; Larkin, 1979; Lesko, 1988). According to Corsaro and Eder (1990) in their review of the literature on peer cultures from early childhood through the teenage years, a limiting factor in this research is its almost exclusive attention to adult-child and peer interactions in formal school contexts. Noting this limitation, Corsaro and Eder, along with others (e.g., Fine, Mortimer, & Roberts, 1990; Takanishi, 1993), have called for studies that take into account adolescents' experiences outside of school in community settings where informal groupings offer different opportunities for interacting with peers and adults.

Theoretical Perspectives

Peer cultures, as defined by Corsaro and Eder (1990), comprise the routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that young people produce and share in interaction with their peers. In addition, adolescent peer cultures are also

[2]Tracing the elements of situation-specific discourse to larger institutional patterns and social structures, Gilbert (1992) acknowledges, is always controversial. However, as he goes on to argue, "given the contested and deferred nature of meaning, and the inevitable ideological dimension of the processes of production and interpretation, all interpretive research faces this dilemma, which is not avoided by restricting the focus to a particular exchange or locale" (p. 55).

shaped by experiences with family, adults, and in community institutions such as school and church (Finders, 1996a). From this definition, it follows that the study of young adolescents would focus on how they negotiate, reinvent, and jointly create their lifeworlds with others of their own age and with the adults who share their worlds. The importance of communal activity to this socialization process cannot be underestimated. As Corsaro and Eder have stressed, "social structure and culture are not merely static niches or environments, they are public and collective processes of negotiation and interpretive apprehension" (p. 217). In other words, adolescent peer cultures are continually negotiated as adolescents move among multiple and competing values, beliefs, rituals, and power relations. Nowhere is this social dynamic of peer culture clearer in its implications for researchers and teachers than in Finders' work (1996a; 1996b), which illustrates how young adolescents' membership within classroom-based peer culture groups regulates their literate practices both in and out of school.

The socialization process alluded to in Corsaro and Eder's (1990) definition of peer culture, with its focus on the connectedness between acts of communication and the creation of adolescents' various and complex lifeworlds, can be linked to some of the more recent work on discourse as institutionally informed social practice (Fairclough, 1989; Gilbert, 1992; Kamberelis, 1995). Conceiving of discourse as social practice rests on the view that language is both a social process and a socially conditioned process (Fairclough, 1989). This view of language and society goes deeper than merely an external relationship between the two entities. For Fairclough, the relationship is both internal and dialectical in that "linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena" (p. 23; emphases in the original).

This concept of discourse is concerned with the way social interactions at the local level relate to broader power structures at the institutional and societal levels, especially through language. Or, as Gilbert (1992) explains it:

> Discourse is the whole process of social interaction, and the elements of spoken or written text are the traces of the productive process and cues for the interpretive process which constitute it. These two processes of production and interpretation involve an interplay between the properties of text and the knowledge, values, beliefs and assumptions ... people draw on when they produce and interpret texts.... This interplay ... can be specified in three different levels of social organization: the level of ... the immediate social environment in which the discourse occurs; the level of the social institution which constitutes a wider matrix for the discourse; and the level of the society as a whole. (p. 49)

The interplay between levels—specifically, how discourse as social practice shapes and is shaped by social structures—is key to understanding Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse analysis, an adaptation of which we used in the present study to explore how participants negotiated and interpreted their involvement in the R & T Club discussions.

Review of Relevant Research

Voluntary Out-of-School Reading

Previous research has shown that positive attitudes toward reading in general are preva-

lent in the early grades, but by middle school they begin to taper off and continue to decline through high school (Cline & Kretke, 1985; McKenna, Ellsworth, & Kear, 1995; Thomson, 1987). Despite what this finding might imply about the amount of time adolescents spend in voluntary reading outside of school, there has been little evidence so far to suggest that they differ appreciably from their younger counterparts. Children of all ages spend relatively little time reading. For example, findings from a landmark study (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988) detailing the relation between 155 fifth graders' growth in reading and how they spent their time outside of school indicated that the median child read 12.9 min per day. This compares to 7.2 min per day for the median child in Walberg and Tsai's (1984) large-scale study of 13-year-olds who were part of the 1979–1980 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Finally, in a study designed to investigate the effects of time spent reading both at school and at home on 195 fifth- and sixth-graders' reading growth, Taylor and Maruyama (1990) reported that the children averaged 15 min of leisure reading at home each day.

Evidence supporting the fact that little time is devoted to voluntary reading outside the school day is not limited to the United States. In a study of 920 fifth graders from a stratified sampling of 31 Irish primary schools, Greany (1980) found that children's daily diaries revealed an average of 5.4% of available out-of-school time was spent in leisure reading. From the results of a written survey aimed at determining Australian teenagers' reading and television viewing habits, Thomson (1987) reported that the majority watched television for more than three hours a night, with only 20% of those surveyed saying they read books regularly. According to Thomson, these findings are comparable to the results obtained on similar surveys conducted in England nearly two decades earlier.

Although most of the existing research on voluntary out-of-school reading is concerned with its relation to children's growth in reading achievement (Anderson, 1995; Anderson et al., 1988; Taylor & Maruyama, 1990), the correlates of leisure time reading (Greany, 1980; Greany & Hegarty, 1987), and the influence of home environment (Morrow & Weinstein, 1986; Neuman, 1986), there is a related line of inquiry that links a bit more closely to the present study's focus on peer culture. However, this research, like the body of literature Corsaro and Eder (1990) reviewed, is situated almost exclusively within the context of schooling. For example, Orellana (1995) examined the gendered aspects of tasks, texts, and talk among children at the primary level, while Myers (1992) investigated similar activities among eighth graders, particularly in terms of that peer group's ownership of literacy (or lack thereof). McGinley and Kamberelis (1996) and Dyson (1995) explored how children's literacy experiences in formal school settings enhance their understanding of the broader social worlds in which they live. Only Finders (1996a, 1996b), in her study of junior high school girls' gendered literacy allegiances in the classroom, spent additional time negotiating a relationship with the girls outside of school. Despite glimpses of how such out-of-school relationships might inform literacy educators' understanding of in-school allegiances, virtual-

ly no work exists in the area of out-of-school reading discussions and adolescent peer culture.

Libraries and Adolescents

At one time in history, collections in public libraries were developed to attract working men, and libraries were even referred to as working men's universities (Garrison, 1979). However, today the picture is quite different. Adolescent literacy services in public libraries are on the rise, no doubt partially due the fact that a quarter of all public library patrons are adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 (Farmer, 1992). According to the results of a survey conducted for the Carnegie Corporation's Task Force on Youth Development and Community Programs, young adolescents who were asked what they would use most during nonschool hours listed, among other things, public libraries, complete with all the latest books and videos that appeal to teenagers (Mathews, 1994).

This finding, while of interest to the present study, does not represent the full spectrum of adolescent peer culture. Public libraries adhere to certain norms, and they represent qualitatively distinct cultures when compared to libraries in schools (Worthy & McKool, 1996) and other institutional settings (Cole, 1995). Teenagers are well aware of these norms as evidenced by Landay's (1995) description of Octavio, a junior high school boy whose reactions were quite different from those tapped in the Carnegie survey:

> I [Landay] arranged a visit to the public library mainly because I thought Octavio would enjoy learning to use the computerized catalogue. His reaction astonished me. Entering the library door, his bearing and manner changed immediately and dramatically. Someone who ordinarily carried himself with great dignity and pride, Octavio seemed to shrink inside himself, growing smaller and quieter. He lowered his head and bowed his shoulders. "I don't know why. I don't think I belong there," he told me later. (p. 24)

Aside from Landay's (1995) study and numerous anecdotal reports of adolescent literacy programs in libraries (e.g., Davidson, 1988; Farmer, 1992; Mathews, 1994), we found little in the way of research on adolescent peer culture as it relates to public libraries. In fact, we located only two large-scale survey studies (Dowd, 1991; Dwyer, Danley, Sussman, & Johnson, 1990) involving young adolescents. Although neither study touched on voluntary reading, findings from the Dwyer et al. (1990) study are of interest here because of what they reveal about socioeconomic status and self-care children (a current euphemism for latchkey children). Of over 4,000 eighth graders surveyed in the Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan areas, the self-care phenomenon was associated significantly more often with higher rather than lower income families, possibly because a greater proportion of families living in higher SES communities had both parents working outside the home. According to Dwyer et al., the public library was also viewed as providing a source of care during periods of school vacation. In the present study, similar arrangements were worked out for a number of the participants, again most notably for those coming from higher income families.

Considering that little is known about adolescent peer culture in relation to out-of-school reading practices (and, by extension, the discussions that follow such reading), the present study is important in its bid to understand how 22 young adolescents and 2 adults negotiated and interpreted their involvement in four Read and Talk Club discussions. The study was guided by the following questions: Who came to the R & T Clubs initially, and why did they continue to come? How did the adolescents and adults negotiate their roles and the social practices of the R & T Club discussions? What traces from the larger institutional and societal contexts that informed participants' daily lives were evident in the discourse produced and interpreted within the R & T Club discussions?

Method

Setting

The adolescent wing in a regional library serving residents of a small southeastern city was the setting for this multicase study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). A modern building situated on a spacious lot adjacent to a large middle school, the library houses an attractive young adult section that features fully stocked shelves, revolving paperback display racks, computer equipment, comfortable furniture, and a number of other resources that teenagers value. The library employs a young adult specialist, a distinction accorded only 11% of all public libraries in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Gaining entry to the site involved several discussions with this specialist and her supervisor, the library's associate director.

The atmosphere of the library is one of openness and trust. For example, one of the Read and Talk Club participants brought a 12-year-old friend who was pregnant to talk to the librarian about finding information on pregnancy and where to go for counseling. Children who lived in close proximity to the library frequently used it as a place to hang out after school and during vacations. Parents, too, saw it as a venue for after school care. On any given day, lines of cars pulling into the library parking lot between 4:30 and 5:00 p.m. were evidence of the daily ritual of parents collecting their children to transport them home. Entire families were drawn to the library in search of materials for projects, videos, and computer access to the World Wide Web. Sometimes they came just to browse, visit the library gift shop, or take in the sights of a special cultural exhibit or performance.

Recruitment of Adolescent Participants

The 22 adolescent participants, all of whom were protected under the human subjects' policies that governed the researchers' university review board, were recruited through various means. The young adult specialist worked with two members of the research team to arrange a sign-up day at the library. Flyers (see Appendix A for example) describing the nature of participants' involvement and offering a $5.00 weekly incentive for keeping an after-school activity log and attending a weekly 30-min book club discussion were distributed in the middle school adjacent to the library, a

Josephine's Tuesday R & T Club			
NAME	GRADE	SEX	ETHNICITY
BJ	9th	female	Black American
Christian	6th	male	Black American
Gaby	7th	female	European American
Melissa	7th	male	Korean

Note: Parents of BJ and Christian preferred the term Black American to the APA convention, African American.

Josephine's Thursday R & T Club			
NAME	GRADE	SEX	ETHNICITY
Athene	7th	female	European American
Bunny	9th	male	European American
Buzz	9th	male	European American
Crazy E	8th	male	European American
Einstein	7th	female	European American
Flea	9th	male	European American

neighboring high school, the local mall, a shopping center parking lot diagonally across the street from the library, and a public housing project a few blocks away. Flyers were also on display at the help desk in the Young Adult section of the library.

Following a 3-week recruitment period in August 1995, a total of 22 adolescents had agreed to participate. There were 10 girls (7 of European American and 3 of African American descent), 12 boys (9 of European American and 2 of African American descent, plus 1 Korean boy who had been in the United States for several years). Two of the girls (1 European American and 1 African American) dropped out less than halfway through the study. Participants came from largely middle-class backgrounds with the exception of 3 children who lived at or near the poverty level (2 of whom were European American girls and 1 who was an African American boy).

Formation of the R & T Clubs

The participants were assigned to specific R & T Clubs with their convenience and grade placement in mind. Participants, as well as Josephine and Colin, were asked to select an afternoon in which regular attendance could be guaranteed. Colin and Josephine then divided

Colin's Wednesday R & T Club			
NAME	GRADE	SEX	ETHNICITY
Cleopatra	6th	female	African American
Jane	7th	female	European American
Jason	7th	male	European American
Rhiannon	6th	female	European American
Rose	6th	female	European American
Tommy	6th	male	African American

Colin's Thursday R & T Club			
NAME	GRADE	SEX	ETHNICITY
Death-Hand	7th	male	European American
Dr. Funk	7th	male	European American
Joe Smith	7th	male	European American
Shaft	7th	male	European American

the participants into four clubs by grade placement. However, this plan was modified in the case of Josephine's two groups. Her Tuesday group had one high school student in it to accommodate a sibling pair. Two 7th-grade girls, originally in Colin's Thursday group of middle-school students, were moved to Josephine's Thursday group after the first meeting because a 9th-grade girl (who later dropped out of the project) complained about being the only girl in that group. This left Colin with an all-boy group. The 8th-grade boy in Josephine's Thursday group was placed there at his own request. Josephine chose to work with the groups that were comprised of high school students because of her past experiences as a high school teacher. Colin preferred to work with middle-school students. The adolescents in this study chose their own pseudonyms and elected to use them throughout the 15 weeks that the R & T Clubs met. Because 2 boys chose female names and 1 girl chose a male name, subjects and their pronoun referents do not always match. The following tables are provided to help the reader match the participants' names with their grade, sex, and ethnicity.

Researchers' Backgrounds and Responsibilities

Colin. As an international doctoral student, with eight years of public school teaching

experience in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Colin was familiar with young adolescents and book clubs, though not from an American perspective. Initially, he was unsure as to what his role ought to be in the two R & T Clubs he facilitated. In Colin's Thursday group, he was able to discard a teacher-like role quite easily, given the nature of the participants' interactional styles. In his Wednesday group, however, Colin frequently found himself intervening at certain junctures so that individual members of the group were not excluded by comments and gestures made by other group members.

Colin believed that being a male played a significant role in the relationships he was able to establish with the young adolescent males in both groups. For example, one boy's mother told him her son profited from seeing Colin as a role model: "He [Tommy] sees you and he knows he can be a jock and still read." In the Thursday group, comprised of all males, Colin believed he was perceived almost as one of the lads (Willis, 1977). Although the males within the group came from backgrounds quite dissimilar to the adolescent males highlighted in Willis's work, the participants' discursive dialogue was reminiscent of many interactions in Colin's own peer adolescent group growing up in a working-class neighborhood of Belfast, Northern Ireland, but yet also reminiscent of peer group interactions in the predominantly middle-class grammar school he attended. Often he would become so immersed in the flow of this group's discussion that he felt the border blurring between "adult leader" and "adolescent participant." Yet when he or the other members of the club deemed it necessary to exert some control, the adolescents and Colin deferred to his adult role.

Josephine. Her experiences as a middle school teacher and an alternative high school language arts teacher informed Josephine's role as a graduate research assistant. While a participant observer on two previous research projects with Donna, she had observed many adolescents talk about text in a variety of classroom settings. These experiences together with her interest in power relations caused Josephine to interrogate her own position as adult participant in the R & T Clubs.

Josephine's Tuesday group expected her to keep order, get members back on track when they got off the topic, ask them questions, and generally act like a teacher. Melissa, one of two boys in the group, said that teachers "keep it [discussion] alive and if it gets kind of boring, they do something ... like change the subject or they ... ask different questions." While her Tuesday group was comfortable with Josephine playing a more teacher-like and facilitative role in the discussion, the Thursday group were adamantly opposed to that position. They did not want Josephine to act like any teacher they knew, saying that if she did, they would act just that much more out of control. The role this group wanted Josephine to play was that of "responsible adult"—someone who would pay them for turning in their completed activity logs, keep them from starting a riot during discussions, and ensure that they didn't "put pennies in the sockets and stuff" (in Buzz's words).

Donna. A series of year-long studies over the past four years in which Donna had been a university researcher/participant observer in

classrooms filled with adolescent talk about texts did not prepare her for what she witnessed in the R & T Clubs. She had been accustomed to using her schoolteacher lens, especially her experiences as a middle school teacher for eight years, to make sense of the classroom literacy events she observed. Now, for the first time, Donna was able to study how young adolescents engage in reading and discussing in an out-of-school setting. She saw the public library as indeed a different venue and one that provided unique opportunities for exploring adolescent and adult interactions with texts of all kinds.

Unlike Josephine and Colin who interacted weekly with the young adolescents in this study, Donna observed the R & T Clubs on an intermittent basis (typically biweekly). One of Donna's weekly responsibilities was to read and analyze the data collected from the study's primary and secondary data sources. Frequently this involved integrating what she was learning from the study with other research and theoretical pieces that she was reading. Donna involved Josephine and Colin in the ongoing analyses through weekly (and sometimes daily) e-mail communications, intermittent written summaries of preliminary findings, and face-to-face research meetings.

Data Collection

The data collected came from three primary sources: the adolescents' daily activity logs, the researchers' field notes backed by audiotaped R & T Club meetings, and transcripts of audiotaped interviews with the adolescents and their parents. Secondary data sources included one videotaped session of each of the R & T Clubs and post-study interviews with the librarian in the Young Adult section and a member of the Wednesday R & T Club who attempted to initiate a similar club at her middle school.

Daily activity log. Each adolescent kept a daily activity log for 15 weeks (Monday through Sunday) that was modeled after one developed by Giles (1994). The log (see Appendix B) consisted of seven questions aimed at determining the amount of time participants spent in voluntary out-of-school reading, the types of materials read, where they read, and why they chose to read voluntarily. Questions required singular and multiple responses. For example, the question that asked if participants had read anything from the time they left school until they went to sleep which was not assigned for homework required them to simply circle "yes" or "no." However, the question that called for circling all materials that described what they had read was followed by 12 possible choices and a fill-in-the blank item labeled "Other." Josephine and Donna entered information from the logs into a computerized data base that allowed sorting on 62 variables by whole group ($n=22$), small group ($n=4$), and individual participants.

Participants were required to turn in their logs on a weekly basis to Josephine and Colin before the start of each R & T Club discussion. Once they had determined that an individual's log was complete, the individual was paid $5.00. We debated the pros and cons of offering a monetary incentive based on the research that has been done on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. In the end, the decision was made to include a weekly reward for completing the

logs and attending the R & T Club discussions, but not for reading *per se*.

Field notes. Josephine and Colin typed field notes as they listened to the audiotaped discussions of each of their weekly Read and Talk Clubs that occurred over a 5-month period from September 1995 through January 1996. In all, there were 15 taped discussions for each of the four R & T Clubs. These were shared among Josephine, Colin, and Donna as part of the ongoing analysis described below.

Adolescent and parent interview guides. Josephine and Colin conducted a total of seven structured group interviews with each of the R & T Clubs they facilitated. The interviews were structured to ensure consistency in collecting data across groups. The questions, which were open-ended and grew from our simultaneous collection and analysis of data, included among others: What do you like about the R & T Club discussions (and what would you change)? What could the library do to make you read more at home? When some people in your group talk, do others get hushed (and why do you think this happens)? What is okay (or not okay) to talk about in your group (and who decides)?

Parent interviews were conducted for the most part in their homes and were dialogically constructed (McGinley & Kamberelis, 1996; Mishler, 1986) to encourage both interviewers (Josephine and Colin) and respondents to negotiate and reformulate their questions and comments. Questions focused on parents' perceptions of the R & T Clubs (Did they think their children liked the discussions and why?), the library (What role did the library play in their family?), and the monetary incentive (How important was the $5.00 in getting their children to complete the logs and attend R & T Club discussions?). Mostly it was the mothers who agreed to be interviewed; however, occasionally both parents were present, and in three instances the fathers were the sole respondents. The audiotaped parent interviews were transcribed by a professional and then reviewed by Josephine and Colin. When inconsistencies were spotted, they listened to the audiotapes and made corrections on the transcripts, which were then retyped.

Analyses. Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted on the daily activity logs. Charts were prepared that showed the breakdown of responses in raw form and percentages for individuals and for groups. Information from these charts were used in characterizing the membership of the R & T Clubs as a whole and in differentiating the groups, mainly on attributes associated with the time spent in reading voluntarily, types of materials read, and reasons for choosing to read voluntarily.

The field notes and transcripts of the adolescent and adult interviews were analyzed using critical discourse analysis. We attempted to relate specific features of the R & T Club members' socially mediated interactions to the larger (institutional/societal) social practices which produced them and through which they were interpreted. As the person responsible for focusing the research team's attention on the relation of social meanings produced and interpreted locally with those operating more broadly, Donna used several different approaches to data analysis and write up. For example, in the first few weeks of the study, she wrote narrative vignettes using data from

each of the primary sources. Later, she turned to writing analytical memos that were e-mailed to Josephine and Colin for their responses and interpretation. It is important to note here that we used writing as a way to shape our eventual representation of the data. By writing early and often (see Alvermann, O'Brien, & Dillon, 1996), we remained alert to the changes that needed to be made in the ongoing data collection and analysis process.

Our interpretive analysis was systematic and thorough. Josephine and Colin exchanged copies of their typed field notes and gave copies to Donna. We read them and wrote comments or questions in the margins. These written responses became the focus of the team's three-way e-mail discussions and regularly scheduled research meetings. In a similar manner, Donna read and responded to transcripts of the interviews that Josephine and Colin conducted with the participants and their parents. In an attempt to reduce the large data set to a workable size, Donna summarized the interview transcripts by question and by group prior to writing theoretical memos on emerging themes. She also read and reread the field notes several times, each time searching inductively for patterns in the data (e.g., processes for choosing books and themes, negotiating roles, and discussing what was read). In all, this first pass through the data yielded a document that was 77 single-spaced pages. It became the focus of several research meetings in which we discussed at length the relative significance and strength of each pattern, sought agreement on naming the patterns, and analyzed the relations of patterns identified locally to those found in the literature that dealt with broader contexts (e.g., institutions and society at large).

Each of us wrote a series of interpretive, integrative memos in the manner recommended by Roponen (1995). These memos, which were grounded both on the original data (primary and secondary data sources) and on other previously written theoretical memos, were exchanged prior to our research meetings for comments and corrections. The integrative memos served to highlight our emergent understandings of roles, social practices, and context-shaping discourses. They also helped to bring life to abstract theoretical concepts such as shifting power relations or discourse as social practice. In this way, we came to understand certain things about adolescent peer culture as enacted through out-of-school reading discussions in the library. These findings are described next.

Read and Talk Clubs: Social Outlets for Young Adolescents

Dr. Funk: When I started this [R & T Club] fifteen weeks ago, I didn't think it was going to be like it was. I thought it was going to be more serious, you know, down to business and stuff.

Dr. Funk's reflection on what he had anticipated initially as a member of the R & T Club discussions motivated us to look systematically at our data for evidence that would either support or refute similar expectations among other members. We found support for Dr. Funk's thinking, particularly among those adolescents whose expectations were informed

by their previous experiences discussing texts in schools. These individuals brought with them distinct ideas of what "Read and Discuss" (a prominent phrase on the recruitment flyers) meant as practices at school. They consistently resisted those practices and were forthright in their declarations that R & T Club discussions should not resemble classroom discussions. For instance, members of Dr. Funk's group said that they had expected much more structured discussions. They were quick to point out, however, that had such been the case, they were sure some members of their group would have quit early on. Bunny emphasized that because school was boring another half hour of school-like activity would have "driven them [members of his group] over the edge." To keep the R & T Clubs from being like school—"structured and boring"—both the adolescent and adult members of the clubs negotiated among themselves the institutionalized discourse of school-based discussions. In brief, they worked cooperatively to create a space that was comfortable for everyone, which, because of the distinct makeup of each R & T Club, looked very different for the various groups. Despite these differences, there were some important commonplaces among the groups.

Profiles of the R & T Clubs

Looking back to the recruitment process, we should not have been surprised that adolescents who signed up to participate in the advertised "Read, Discuss and Earn" project liked to read. We had assumed that a more diverse group of adolescents readers ranging from avid reader and non-reader would sign-up because of the monetary payment. Instead, by far, the vast majority of the R & T Club members were avid readers. As we worked with the groups and analyzed individuals' activity logs, we realized the importance of books and other reading materials in their daily lives. The young adolescents in our study read an average of 46 min a day, 7 days a week, over a 15-week period. This was voluntary out-of-school reading (i.e., reading done in addition to school related assignments). When asked the question, How long did you spend reading out of school, on average 20% of the responses fell into the category 2 hr or more. Books (paperback and hardbacks) were by far the most popular reading material, followed by magazines, and their own writing (e.g., some wrote their own comics, short stories, and plays). According to their daily activity logs, the three most frequent responses (72% of all responses) given for why they read after school or on weekends included: "Because they wanted to"; "For their own pleasure/enjoyment"; and "To relax or calm down."

Members of the R & T Clubs described the public library as an integral part of their lives, and their parents agreed. It was a resource for locating books to read for pleasure, information for school reports, and videos. Members also noted the relaxed and inviting atmosphere of the Young Adult section of the library. Cleopatra put it best when she said, "It's a place where I can kick off my shoes, relax, and read."

Josephine's Tuesday R & T Club. The Tuesday group met in the Young Adult section of the library at a table that was reserved for their

R & T Club discussions. The table was situated between four stand-up paperback book carousels and a wall of hardbacks. Library patrons milled around the table as they browsed the paperback carousels. Occasionally a friend or relative walked by and their presence was briefly acknowledged.

Of the four adolescents in the group, two were siblings and the other two knew each other from school. The sibling pair, BJ (a ninth-grade African American girl) and her brother Christian (a sixth grader), attended one of the county's private Christian schools. BJ usually came to discussions having read three or four books, mostly about other adolescents. Unlike her brother, who was the youngest member of the group and the most quiet, BJ was eager to talk about the books she had read.

Gaby, a European American seventh-grade girl had attended school with Melissa, a Korean boy, for many years. The two also played in the middle school orchestra. There was a certain tension between the two, which both seemed to enjoy. Their interactions tended to move in the direction of a friendly debate. Gaby and Melissa were frequently spotted in the Young Adult section of the library on days other than their meeting days. In fact, Melissa often sat in on (but did not speak at) the Thursday R & T club discussions.

The members of this R & T club liked to read. Although not the most avid readers compared to the other R & T clubs, they reported spending between 20 and 60 min a day reading voluntarily outside of school. Approximately 25% of that time was spent reading library books. Often, after the R & T Club meetings, members of this group were observed checking out books at the Young Adult desk.

Colin's Wednesday R & T Club. On Wednesday afternoon, Colin met with six middle school students at the reserved table in the Young Adult section of the library. As with the Tuesday club, there were adolescent patrons milling around as they met. Members of the club included Rhiannon and her friend Rose, both sixth-grade European American girls who came to the R & T club meetings from a neighboring county. The library provided Rhiannon and Rose with a complimentary library card which allowed them to check out books during the 15 weeks of the R & T Club. They carpooled and both had to pay $1.00 a week to Rhiannon's mother for gasoline. Rhiannon liked coming to the R & T Club because there was talk about books and "other things, not just books." She liked country music and to read *Sweet Valley High* books. Her taste in reading was shared by Rose.

Cleopatra and Tommy, 2 sixth-grade African Americans who attended the same middle school and knew each other from church, had mothers who were friends. Cleopatra said she was sometimes conscious of what she said at the R & T Club because she thought Tommy might "tell his mom what I said and she'll tell my mom." To this, Tommy responded, "I ain't no snitch!" Cleopatra, the self-identified feminist of the club retorted, "Girls worry about those sorts of things."

Jane and Jason, both of European American extraction, were seventh graders but attended middle schools different from one another and from the other members of the group. Jane, who came from a well-educated and affluent

family, read mostly classics when she first joined the club. She confided in her mother that she was appalled at the reading selections of other girls in the group, perhaps deeming her own choice of classics as somehow better than books from the *Sweet Valley High* series. Jason rarely spoke but did become animated when discussion centered around forms of humor that he appreciated, particularly that of Monty Python.

Taken as a whole, members of the Wednesday R & T Club were avid readers. They reported reading two or more hours on 41% of the days logged. The group's favorite reading material consisted of library books. As to why they read after school and on weekends, their logs reflected that they primarily read to find out or learn something interesting and to avoid becoming bored.

Colin's Thursday R & T Club. This group of four seventh-grade European American boys, all of whom knew each other prior to the start of the study, met in a back corner of the Young Adult section. The area stood out because of its homey atmosphere and large overstuffed chairs, which were arranged in a circle. The group included Death-Hand, Dr. Funk, Shaft, and Joe Smith, all of whom attended the same school, and who (with the exception of Joe Smith) had been friends for some time—a fact that may have partially explained Joe Smith's reticence to join in discussions. Dr. Funk was the brother of Flea, a member of Josephine's Thursday group. Death-Hand and Shaft both prided themselves on being, in their words, "a little off the wall at times." Shaft, by all accounts, was considered the ring leader and the one most apt to add humor to the group. Of all the R & T Club members, only Shaft boasted that he did not read much. However, he did admit to becoming so absorbed in *The Lost World* (Crichton, 1995) that "one night [he] took the book and read three chapters"—a comment that brought on loud cheering and clapping among his peers.

The group was known to talk animatedly about any texts that pertained to science fiction or horror. Unlike other R & T Club members, the boys in Colin's Thursday spent a lot of time after school playing electronic games or using a computer. The group also had the highest number of logged instances in which members checked that they had not read anything outside of school-related assignments. When they did read voluntarily, their favorite materials were magazines.

Josephine's Thursday R & T Club. The meeting place for this group was a conference room in the library, a location chosen out of consideration for the regular patrons of the Young Adult section. Although there were tables and chairs available in the Young Adult section, Josephine believed that two R & T clubs meeting simultaneously would disrupt the normal activity of the library. In retrospect, this was a wise decision because her Thursday group was very loud.

The three ninth-grade boys (Flea, Bunny, and Buzz) and one eigth-grade boy (Crazy E) in the group were all friends outside of school. Bunny and Buzz had made several movies together with help from Shaft (a member of Colin's Thursday group). These movies, which had been viewed by all the group members, were often referenced during R & T Club discussions. Athene and Einstein, two seventh-

grade girls, also knew each other before the study began. They were also acquainted with the boys.

All were avid readers. Members of this group spent more time than any other group reading materials unrelated to school assignments. It was not atypical for adolescents in this group to report reading from 1½ to 2 or more hr each day. The group also distinguished itself from other R & T Clubs in that members read from a diverse set of materials, including books, computer programs, newspapers, trading cards (magic cards), comic books, magazines, and the TV guide. Flea, alone, liked the classics; the others preferred more popular genres, such as science fiction and modern myths.

The Money Wasn't Everything

> *Death-Hand: Yes, the five dollars a week enticed us.*
> *Dr. Funk added: For the first couple of weeks and then we started liking it.*

Although we do not discount the motivational significance of the $5.00 payment, which the adolescents received in return for filling out the daily logs and coming to the meetings, we do not believe it sufficiently explains their continued attendance and the fact they rarely missed a meeting. Data gathered from both the adolescent and parent interviews told us that indeed the $5.00 incentive had played a role in attracting members to the R & T Clubs initially. But, it wasn't the prime motivator for their continued attendance. For example, Tommy said he came because "[I] learn about books that other kids read.... I don't come just for the money, I come because it is fun." Gaby's father thought money was half the motivation for his daughter's attendance, and social gratification, the other half. Gaby, along with several other members of the R & T Clubs, reminded us that $5.00 was not enough to motivate someone to read who did not already like to do so. A further indication that the monetary incentive was not the only reason members attended the R & T Club discussions was the fact they sometimes came to the meetings without their logs, which meant they did not get paid.

Unlike us, the young adult librarian was quite convinced that the $5.00 incentive for filling out the daily logs and attending the weekly R & T Club discussions was the primary motivator in garnering and maintaining adolescents' interests in the clubs. She believed that "overall, the kids enjoyed it [the R & T Club experience]." She also commented that she was "sorry they don't get more practice [reading and discussing] in this kind of informal setting."

Social Outlets

We believe a likely explanation for much of the continued interest in the R & T Club discussions was the fact they provided social outlets for young adolescents who liked to read but who, by their own account (see excerpt at the beginning of the report) felt frustrated in their particular school cultures. They told us they had no place to go and talk about books with others who also liked to read. The parents reiterated what their children were telling us:

R & T Club discussions were social outlets for young adolescents who like to read. For instance, Cleopatra's mother said they "have been good in that there aren't a lot of kids in our neighborhood who sit down and talk about books.... So it's been a good outlet for her." Likewise, Rhiannon's mother said the meetings had given her daughter an opportunity to be with others her age who were "on the same wavelength as Rhiannon." And Einstein's mother concluded, "I think she's really enjoying the discussion and the socialization of the reading group.... She looks forward to them [the meetings] and enjoys the social interaction with other avid readers.... It seems to have become a social [occasion]."

The adolescents echoed their parents' comments and spoke directly to the concept of R & T Clubs as social places for talk about books. Cleopatra said she and her mother were the only ones in her family who read books, so she liked coming to the R & T Club to talk with others about what she read. Rhiannon likewise found the R & T Club discussions personally satisfying. She said she had no one at school with whom she could "talk books" because she read at a higher level than others in her grade. Athene described her club meeting as a place where "we talk about books and tease each other.... It means a fun place where I talk about my favorite subject [reading] and see my friends." Similarly, Buzz declared that the R & T Club was a place he got to see friends who liked to read but whom he didn't see on a routine basis. He welcomed this opportunity to be with his friends and talk about books. For Shaft and Dr. Funk, the R & T Club discussions provided outlets for socializing that were not available to them in school. In Dr. Funk's words, "we can get away with saying a lot more in this book club Death-Hand agreed, noting that in school if he were to say "yuck" in reaction to a book, he would be criticized for speaking his mind.

Although a majority of the young adolescents in the study knew each other before they came to the R & T Clubs, for some, the clubs were the source of new friendships. For example, BJ indicated the discussions were a way of getting to know other people and to make friends outside of school. A case in point was her own developing relationship with Gaby, whom she had not met prior to the start of the study. As the weeks wore on, BJ and Gaby often sided on issues discussed during the R & T Clubs. Occasionally, they shared a few private laughs and nodded knowingly at one another across the table. Despite their lack of contact outside the few short minutes the R & T Club met each week, it appeared that BJ and Gaby had struck up a special kind of friendship, one sparked by common interests in reading and discussing books.

In sum, the young adolescents in this study were avid readers. On average, they read 46 min a day, 7 days a week, over a 15-week period. This amount of time contrasts sharply with other findings from much larger studies of out-of-school reading (Anderson et al., 1988; Farr, Fay, Myers, & Ginsberg, 1987; and National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). Important as this contrast is, we believe a more interesting finding from the present study is that young adolescents who like to read appear to value social outlets such as the R & T Clubs—places outside of school

(perhaps coincidentally public libraries) where they can be with others of like interests and attitudes.

Negotiating the Social Practices of the R & T Clubs

We know from current research that adolescents perceive some classroom practices are better than others in creating an environment conducive to discussing what they have read (Alvermann et al., 1996; Baloche & Kletzien, 1996). Among those practices so named are the following: reading a common text, talking one at a time, sticking to the topic, and knowing and liking other discussants. These practices are not unlike those that teachers perceive as being conducive to good discussion (Alvermann, Commeyras, Young, Randall, & Hinson, in press). It is understandable, therefore, that some of these same institutionalized school practices would be acknowledged by the young adolescents and adults in the present study. However, the ways in which they negotiated these practices in the R & T Clubs produced different patterns of interaction, although the influences of institutionalized school practices are still visible. Below, we analyze two of those patterns informed by the notion that adolescents negotiate, reinvent, and jointly create their lifeworlds with others their own age and with adults (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Finders, 1996a; 1996b).

Choosing Texts to Talk About

At first, Josephine and Colin resisted the adolescents' suggestion that the R & T Clubs abandon the school-sanctioned practice of reading common texts in preparation for group discussions. Concerned about how such discussions would flow, they offered the adolescent participants several alternatives. One choice involved all reading the same book and discussing some aspect of it. Another choice consisted of reading a book or other texts from a common genre, such as mystery or romance. A third choice, one suggested by Josephine's Tuesday group, involved reading anything they wanted to, with an eye to discovering common themes as they interacted with one another during the R & T Club discussions. This choice was eventually adopted by the other clubs, although it is important to point out that groups were free to change their minds at any time. That they did not deviate from the Tuesday group's choice except on one occasion points to the apparent satisfaction they derived from reading different materials in preparation for a "common" discussion.

The one exception was the time three of the four groups wanted to read *The Lost World* (Crichton, 1995). We purchased individual copies of the book for the two Thursday groups and Josephine's Tuesday group. Despite the popularity of the book and the discussions that surrounded it, the groups went back to their former pattern of reading whatever they wanted. Only Flea was in favor of reading books in common. One day in an attempt to persuade his peers of the value of such a practice, Flea said (after a particularly school-like discussion about *The Lost World*), "I think it's helped our conversation, us having [read] the same book. I want to make a recommendation.... I think we should all get like a paperback anthology of

short stories.... Do you think its a good idea?" His suggestion was virtually ignored by everyone except Josephine, who said she liked his idea. However, it was not approved by the group.

The adolescents in all groups stood firm on their preference for reading different materials. For instance, they told us they liked coming to the discussions to hear about different books and to get ideas about what to read. When asked what she liked about her R & T Club, Gaby said, "I like the fact that ya'll don't pressure us.... You let us choose our books." Christian added, "I like it because we have our own choice of books and we don't have to read the same thing."

Josephine and Colin continued to feel some uncertainty about discussions that lacked a common text. At times they wondered about relinquishing their claim to the traditional teacher's role. Comments such as "If I were a teacher, I would ..." appeared in their field notes. Partly due to their conflicted feelings on the issue, they worked hard to encourage members of the R & T Clubs to negotiate alternatives for reading and talking about the same book. In their roles as adult participants, Josephine and Colin offered clarifying questions to the adolescents during these negotiations. For instance, when members of Josephine's Thursday group wanted to read different books and then find common themes across their readings, Josephine questioned how this practice would work. She asked, "Should Bunny tell about his book and then Buzz try to relate his book to Bunny's book? Is that what you are talking about?" The adolescents agreed that Josephine had interpreted them correctly.

Oftentimes, Josephine and Colin experienced tensions in their negotiations of their positions as the adult participants in the R & T Clubs. Josephine told one of the parents, "I worked really hard not to be a teacher and to let them talk about what they wanted to, but there were times when I had a really hard time." Colin experienced similar tensions. For example, the participants in his Wednesday group constantly looked to him to maintain a high leadership profile and often sought his approval. This situation led Colin to question what his "ideal" role should be, for when he exerted too high a profile in the Thursday group, it sometimes had the effect of disrupting the natural flow of that group's interactions. The following dialogue took place in response to Colin's question on what libaries could do to make participants want to read more.

Death Hand: For every time you read a book or you check it out, you get a buck.

Dr. Funk: Or if the book doesn't come back you get a fine.

Shaft: You just check out twenty books and then you move.

Death Hand: A dollar a book. What else?

Dr. Funk: Well, they could give away books; stuff like that

Colin: Okay. Anything else. What if ...

Shaft: What I think is like they should have a thing where you have a deadline to read so many books, and they you get a reward.

Colin: Apart from that.

Death Hand: Yeah, if you read a certain number of books.

Colin: Okay, apart from the rewards, what else? We'retrying to get you to want to read. You being the one who wants to read books, not making you read books, but rather you wanting to read them.

Shaft: As I said, if I was rewarded, I'd want to read a lot.

Colin: Apart from that ...

Colin interrupted the flow of participants' interactions on a number of occasions with the words "apart from that." Indicating a certain degree of dissatisfaction at the direction in which the adolescent dialogue was going, Colin thus broke the natural flow of their interactions. He steered the conversation in a way he perceived appropriate, but which prevened the participants from responding with candor to the question he posed.

Verbal comments made during the discussions also reflected the tensions sometimes experienced by both adolescents and adults. One day when Josephine grew frustrated over her inability to get her Thursday group's attention, she said rather loudly, "Okay, wait a minute, wait a minute! We're not going to talk about this [gossip about the private school Einstein attended] again. I have no power [all participants were talking]. I have none—absolutely none!" Buzz corrected her, "You have some, we just don't acknowledge it." And Flea added, "The world doesn't work on power, it works on the *illusion* of power." To this, Josephine laughed and realized that within her Thursday group, they had indeed created their own culture and this culture was continually being negotiated among the adolescents and herself.

Deciding Who Gets to Talk

Turn taking, another discussion practice that is widely accepted as part of the institution of schooling, became the object of negotiation in the R & T Clubs. In school discussions, the general rule is for one person to speak at a time. However, Dr. Funk and his peers in Colin's Thursday group believed that the R & T Club discussions felt more like "real" discussions than those he participated in at school. He told us, "here we can interrupt each other, like a real discussion. In school you can't do that. You got to raise your hand until the teacher allows you to speak. If you don't, you get lunch detention or something." Joe Smith supported Dr. Funk by saying that he was glad the R & T Club discussions had been different from school discussions with their question-answer formats.

Members of Josephine's Thursday group also spoke of the free flowing nature of the R & T Club discussions. They thought it was fine to talk all at once. In fact, Buzz told her that he liked coming to the R & T Club meeting because it gave him practice following three discussions at one time. Others in the group thought that members were responsible for creating their own time to talk—if they wanted to say something—say it! Occasionally, however, Josephine felt it necessary to intervene at certain junctures so that individual members of the group would not feel excluded.

In contrast, the Tuesday and Wednesday clubs believed talking one at a time was an essential part of their R & T Club discussions. They did not resist or renegotiate the school practice of turn taking. Instead, from their interview transcripts, we learned how proud they were of the fact that everyone listened to each other. BJ and Melissa thought it was best to let one person talk at a time so speakers wouldn't lose their train of thought. Members

of both groups offered suggestions for monitoring each other's participation. Rhiannon thought that body language was an effective way to stop people from taking too long a turn. She said by looking bored at the person talking you get your message across. Melissa added that he knew when someone wanted to talk, especially when that person had not talked for a long time.

In retrospect, Josephine and Colin believe their roles were shaped by each group's manner of negotiating larger institutional practices related to school discussions. Often, they found themselves resisting or reinventing their teacher roles. They recognized similar behaviors on their part when members of the R & T Clubs negotiated the kinds of materials they would read and how they would read them. Negotiation between adults and adolescents became a communal activity, an aspect of the larger socialization processes that Corsaro and Eder (1990) deem essential to studying peer culture. One other aspect of the larger social milieu that influenced Josephine and Colin's roles, as well as the practices of the R & T Clubs, was gender, particularly as it was constituted in the discourse of both male and female participants.

Gender Considerations

Earlier we noted Gilbert's (1992) criticism that qualitative studies in education tend to focus on relating the particular to the general at the expense of understanding how the more general constitutes the particular. In seeking to understand how the gendered interactions in the R & T Clubs came to be constructed, it is necessary to examine the wider social forces that possibly influenced such constructions. For a long time we have known that societal and cultural forces do differentiate and shape patterns of gendered interactions. Work undertaken by Chodorow in the 1970s and Gilligan in the 1980s points to childhood and adolescent socialization processes in influencing behavior and actions, resulting in boys defining their identities through competitive, domineering and aggressive activities, whereas a different standard holds for girls. Here, relative passivity, with attention to relationship and qualities of caring and connectedness appropriately define the female identity. Essentialist theorizing about gender remains pervasive, continuing to lead to walls being built between the sexes.

The Walls Continue To Be Constructed....

One meeting of Colin's Wednesday R & T Club involved six participants, four of whom were female, discussing their favorite magazines. Noting a reticence on the part of the girls in the group to discuss beyond a superficial level the content of their magazines, Colin asked why the conversation did not go into more detail. Rhiannon responded that she wouldn't discuss something in the group that had been specifically written for girls. Addressing the two males, Tommy and Jason, she asserted, "I wouldn't talk about something you boys wouldn't understand." Pressed further she said, "I'd be worried about what the boys would say," and was confident that she knew the manner in which the boys would react. "It's a given." Challenged by the other females in the group, their silence possibly construed as acquiescence to the ideas she expressed.

The overt exclusion of the male participants, Colin included, from the discussion about the magazines' content mirrored previous interactions regarding the *Sweet Valley High* series. Named by 3 of the 4 girls in the group (Rose, Rhiannon, and Cleopatra) as popular reading fare, this series is known for its stereotyping of adolescent females. In Rhiannon's words, the series is written "from a girl's point of view." During discussions involving the series, Colin noted in his field notes that questions or comments raised by himself or Tommy obtained scant regard from the female participants. The males' suggestions and queries remained relatively inconsequential to the major flow of the discussion; seemingly, the girls had succeeded in silencing the boys in the group by not acknowledging their comments as significant or informed. Subsequent to the discussions of the *Sweet Valley High* books, Jane, who had initially shown disdain for them, developed a liking for the series. The reasons behind such a development are open to interpretation, but a desire to engage in gender-appropriate literacy practice is not beyond the realm of possibilities.

Traditional conceptions of masculinity expressed by the males in the study assumed a number of guises. Even in the absence of female participants (as was the case for Colin's Thursday all male group), the frequency with which Death-Hand, Dr. Funk, Joe Smith, and Shaft resorted to essentializing male behaviors highlighted for us the continual brick-by-brick construction of the walls separating the two sexes in society at large. For example, Shaft, one of the more popular participants in the group, garnered a large share of his peers' approval through his talent for clever and at times disdainful comments, but always in the course of interjecting humor into discussions. One of his peers noted that Shaft "says things we wouldn't say.... He makes us all laugh and have a good time." Shaft, acknowledging that the attention he receives is deserved, offered, "I speak most in the group. I'm also responsible for what the others say." This comment was greeted with much laughter, serving only to enhance Shaft's central position in the group.

And The Walls Begin to Crumble ...

In much of the sociological literature cited by Corsaro and Eder (1990), the walls enclosing essentialist notions of adolescent gendered behavior appear firm and unscathed. Yet, as evidenced in the three examples that follow, the adolescents in our particular study were able to articulate with some success their awareness of alternative perspectives on gender—ones that both challenge and contradict the status quo. In the first example, R & T Club members digress from a dialogue on urban myths and cyberpunk literature to gossip about Einstein's peer group at the private academy she attends. This digression serves to highlight their resistance to, if not outright rejection of, stereotypical constructions of gender roles, even though ironically the subjects in their statements are cast in an essentialist light.

In the discussion leading up to the exchange below, Athene defends Einstein, saying that Einstein's parents *make* her attend the private academy. Buzz says that everyone at that

school brings credit cards to class, and Bunny adds, "I'll trade you my Visa for your Mastercard." Laughter follows, whereupon Einstein adds some gossip of her own:

Einstein: The girls are psychotic. They are like Hee, hee, hee, I don't even know what a politician is.

Athene: They haven't one thought worth saying.

Einstein: (*mimicking a girl from her school*): Teacher, teacher, I have to go to the bathroom; I broke a nail.

Bunny: Excuse me, my broker just called; I made another million.

Einstein ends the exchange, saying the boys can think only of football. In her words, the boys are mindless, "like duhhhh," and Athene agrees, calling them "sexist jocks."

A second example of an R & T Club discussion in which a member speaks up against stereotypical thinking about gender comes from an exchange between Rhiannon and Jane during their group's sharing of favorite magazines. Rhiannon commented to the group that "boys spend their time talking about sports," partly in reference to Tommy's obsession with sports magazines. Jane disagreed, saying, "me and my friends talk about sports, we're competitive, and we're all girls." Both Josephine and Colin were surprised at the extent to which the adolescents in the study were able to identify and critically evaluate certain social constructions of gender. As noted earlier, the participants displayed a considerable awareness of the range in activities appropriate to males and females. From choosing pseudonyms (Melissa, Einstein, Bunny) that did not reflect their biological roots to expressing views that were unconstrained by traditional notions of gender, a good number of them attempted to transcend essentialist ways of thinking.

In the third example, the notion of multiple subjectivities (Davies, 1993) and its implications for troubling essentialist thinking found expression in Josephine's Thursday group. Locally aware of how they positioned themselves (and in turn were positioned by others), members of this group noted the ways in which such positionings play out in the larger social world. In doing so, they recognized the importance of positionality in history texts. They also recognized that the multidimensional nature of individuals' positions (especially women's) was virtually ignored in those texts.

Flea: There were lots of women in history that made a difference; it just wasn't recorded.

Josephine: Why do you think this was?

Flea: That's how the patriarchy works.

Einstein: There's evidence to support that women did important stuff and gave credit to their husbands.

Crazy E: There's the women who found Jesus's tomb after he died. There's not much in the Bible about that because they didn't want to write about women.

To summarize, Gilbert's (1992) warning that to neglect the historically institutionalized nature of language and meaning is to put too much emphasis on the situationally specific is particularly apropos in this section on gendered practices within the R & T Club discussions. There is evidence that the young adolescents in this study were interacting in gendered ways that they deemed socially appropriate. However, without a broader context in which to view

how gender gets constructed, we are left with little understanding of the implications of such discursive practices. In the following section, we take up these implications, beginning with gender and moving back through the discussion of negotiated roles and practices to end where we began with a look at the R & T Clubs as social outlets for young adolescents.

Discussion of Implications

The gendered discursive practices that we observed in this study were as varied as those known to exist in society at large (Commeyras, Orellana, Bruce, & Neilsen, 1996). Reproduced continually through institutionalized social structures and language common to school-sanctioned discussions, these practices tend to essentialize differences between males and females. Instances of such essentializing interactions among the young adolescents in the R & T Clubs were no different than those we have noted in earlier work involving high school students (Moore, 1996; Phelps & Weaver, 1996) and graduate students enrolled in a content literacy course (Alvermann, 1996). Taking stock of these locally situated instances and interpreting them through the larger contexts of school and society enabled us to explore a number of social practices common to young adolescent peer culture.

One such practice, gossip, has a history of providing individuals with socially acceptable ways of gaining acceptance and solidifying group membership (Eder & Enke, 1991; Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995; Leach, 1996). According to Corsaro and Eder (1990), gossip is integral to peer group membership among young adolescents, primarily due to the fact "it reaffirms ... and reveals basic values and beliefs of group members" (p. 214). We observed this phenomenon in the playful use of language (e.g., "Excuse me, my broker just called; I made another million") among members of Einstein's R & T Club. In an attempt to align herself clearly within the bookish culture of that club, Einstein expressed disdain for what she perceived as unacceptable behavior among her peers at the private school she attended. In turning her back on the gendered discursive talk of her peer group at the academy, Einstein essentially excluded them—an action similar to, but differently motivated from, the exclusionary practices described in Finder's (1996a) study of literacy and allegiance in the junior high school.

Recent research undertaken in other English-speaking countries has drawn attention to how institutional settings are often the "sites of varying contradictions, ambiguities and tensions ... in relation to sex/gender social relations" (Mac An Ghaill, 1994, p. 8). The existence of such ambiguities and tensions may serve to bring to the surface the alternative and dissenting voices (voices transcending essentialist notions) and in so doing may begin the troubling and problematizing of frameworks which "regulate and reify unstable sex/gender categories" (p. 9). We believe the ideas articulated by some of the adolescents in the R & T Clubs provide evidence of the expression of such troubling and problematizing in this country. Certainly some of their discussions reflected their willingness to assist in disassembling the so-called wall between the sexes. Like the interactions among the older adoles-

cents in Moore's (1996) study, those of the younger ones in the present study suggest that gendered boundaries are crossed rather frequently in talking about books and other reading matter (e.g., Jane's comment to Rhiannon that girls talk about sports [magazines] and are as competitive as boys).

The occasional tensions experienced by the adults and adolescents in this study as they negotiated how or what would be read and who would do the talking in the R & T Clubs also had their roots in the larger context of schooling. School-sanctioned social practices, much like those described by Finders (1996a), were clearly in evidence, with both the adult and adolescent participants in the R & T Clubs calling upon them at will. So common were these practices in structuring who talked that for two of the groups (Josephine's Tuesday group and Colin's Wednesday group) it would be difficult to tell them apart from school-based discussions. It was quite another matter, however, in terms of *who* determined what would be read and *how* it would be discussed. Here, one would have no difficulty in distinguishing the R & T Club discussions from those held in classrooms (cf. Almasi & Gambrell, 1994; Dillon, 1989).

As Corsaro and Eder's (1990) review of that literature would suggest, we would have expected to observe adolescent resistance to adult authority in the R & T Clubs had Josephine and Colin taken up their traditional teacher roles. Because they did not assume those roles, the adolescents in the group were less likely to have felt the need to resist their presence as co-participants in the discussions. What we attempted to show in the section on negotiating the social practices of the R & T Clubs were the shifting patterns of power relations between the adults and the adolescents. Similar patterns have been reported in Hinchman and Young's (1996) study of resistance and acquiescence in text-based classroom talk. Unlike the adolescents in that study, those in the R & T Club discussions generally seemed not to withhold their voices (e.g., all groups stood firm on their preference for reading different materials as opposed to a common text). Where exceptions to that may have been the case (e.g., Jason's unexplained reticence), we have no data with which to speculate. Hindsight tells us that individual interviews, rather than group, might have tapped into the source of participants' reluctance to voice their opinions.

Adolescent peer culture in out-of-school reading discussions resembles that of adults. The social nature of adult (out-of-school) book club discussions has been described by Flood, Lapp, Alvarez and their colleagues (1994) as well as Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995). Flood et al. described the book club experience as a way of building collegial bonds among teachers. Similarly, Marshall et al. found that in the book clubs they studied, socializing was central to maintaining adults' interest. Every adult participant interviewed mentioned how much he or she enjoyed getting together with friends to discuss the books the group had chosen to read. Participants described how talking about books helped them get to know people better and deepen existing friendships. In the same way, the young adolescents in the R & T Clubs valued the opportunity for interacting socially and developing new friendships or strengthening old ones.

Being with friends is one of the most consistent and salient findings in the literature on adolescent peer culture in school settings (Alvermann, Umpleby, & Olson, in press; Alvermann et al., 1996; Cusick, 1972; Everhart, 1983; Willis, 1981). Judging from the importance attributed to the R & T Clubs as social outlets for young adolescents who like to read, the same might tentatively be implied for out-of-school settings, at least insofar as reading and discussing in a public library are concerned. Naturally, the scope of the present study is much too limited to draw any conclusions about the similarities between in-school and out-of-school peer culture groups. At most, we may have cracked the door that will enable future researchers to get a better look at what voluntary reading in public libraries offers.

One finding we are quite confident in reporting is that adolescents' constant reference to school and how they wanted the R & T Clubs to bear little resemblance to classroom discussions demonstrates the importance of choice in what is read and who gets to talk about it. Not surprisingly, this finding appears related to what we discovered from analyzing the daily activity logs—adolescents read when they want to, and that's more often than we thought.

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Appendix A

Middle and high school students!!

Read, discuss, and earn

$75.00

The National Reading Research Center is currently looking for 30 middle school and high school students to participate in a research study to be conducted at the Athens Regional Library.

Earn $5.00 a week for:

$$ Attending one 30 minute book club meeting a week,

$$ Keeping a record of the literacy activities you do outside of school,

$$ Engaging in interviews about your literacy use,

Interested? Have questions?

Come to an open house

When: **Thursday, September 7, 1995**
anytime from 4:30-6:30

Where: **Conference room, Athens Regional Library**
(parents welcome)

For information call: Josephine Young,
The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) at 542-3674.

Appendix B
Literacy Activity Log

Literacy Activity Log

Code:_____ Date:_____

Respond to the following statements or questions concerning your activities from the end of school today to when you go to sleep. Please be as truthful as possible. Mark only the responses that really apply to you, not what you think someone may want you to mark.

1. While out of school today until I went to sleep. I...(complete this statement by circling all of the following activities that apply to you for the time period mentioned.)

a. Played with or cared for a pet
b. Did household chores
c. Read a book, magazine, etc.
d. Shopped
e. Played an electronic game
g. Read a set of directions
h. Played or practiced a sport
i. Babysat
j. Visited, talked or played with a friend
k. Did homework
l. Played with toys or dolls
m. Used a computer
n. Went to a lesson
o. Watched TV
p. Listened to music
q. Rode a bike
r. Had an appointment
s. Talked on telephone

2. Did you read anything from the time you got out of school today until you went to sleep that you got out of the library?

a. Yes b. No

3. Did you read anything from the time you got out of school today until you went to sleep that <u>was not</u> assigned for homework? (Reading you chose to do for your own reasons.)

a. Yes b. No

4. Circle anything listed below that you read from the time you got out of school today to when you went to sleep.

a. Hardback or paper back books
b. Computer program or service
c. Newspaper article or column
d. Letter or card
e. Trading cards (like baseball cards)
f. Reference book (dictionary, encyclopedia, instructions, etc.)
g. Magazine
h. Something you wrote
i. Newspaper comic strips
j. Comic book
k. Set of directions (for example recipe book, game directions, car manual, etc.)
l. TV Guide
m. Other_____

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5. **Some places where I have read since getting out of school today are: (Circle all that apply to you.)**

a. At sitter's or afterschool care
b. In bedroom or bed
c. In some other room of my home
d. At doctor's or dentist's office
e. Public library
f. Outside
g. Special place or hideaway
h. Friend's house
i. Car or bus
j. In front of TV

6. **Select the amount of time below that best describes how long you spent reading since getting out of school.**

a. None
b. About 1 minute
c. About 5 minutes
d. About 15 minutes
e. About 20 minutes
f. About 30 minutes
g. About 1 hour
h. About 1 1/2 hours
i. For 2 hours or more

7. **What are some reasons why you read after school or this weekend? (Circle all that apply to you.)**

a. I didn't read
b. Because I wanted to.
c. To relax/calm down
d. To find out something/learn something
e. Because I didn't have anything else to do/I was bored
f. Because I heard about something that sounded interesting
g. Because I had to/someone made me
h. For my own pleasure/enjoyment
i. Because I couldn't sleep

Adapted from Giles (1994)

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